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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003119

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NSC FOR DENNIS WILDER, LAN TRUONG
PACOM PLEASE PASS AMB. JOHN, A/S HILL, DAS MARCIEL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [MOPS](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAI KING'S SECRETARY ASSURES AMBASSADOR: NO COUP;
ARMY COMMANDER GIVES SIMILAR ASSURANCES ON LIVE TV

REF: BANGKOK 3080 (QUEEN SUPPORTS PAD)

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4
(b, d).

11. (C) Summary: The streets of Bangkok remained calm October 16; Royal Thai Army (RTA) commander Anupong Paojinda went on live TV late in the day to reiterate that political actors should resolve their differences and that military intervention was not the solution. The King's Principal Private Secretary Arsa Sarasin told the Ambassador on October 16 that Anupong would not launch a coup d'etat. Former PM Anand Panyarachun told Charge that the next three weeks were crucial and perilous, but professed not to know what might occur. Former Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama, an ally of Thaksin Shinawatra, told us that he considered a coup possible but not/not a "strong possibility." Noppadon spoke highly of Anupong, but said anti-government demonstrators would continue efforts to bring down the current government. Noppadon did not believe dissolving parliament would serve People's Power Party (PPP) interests, although he said Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat was considering this step as a last resort. In an end of day development, the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) found cause against PM Somchai Wongsawat on charges of dereliction of duty in a case dating back to 2000, when he was Justice Ministry Permanent Secretary; the case now goes to the Justice Ministry's Civil Service Commission for review.

12. (C) Comment: We are encouraged by the assurance the Ambassador received from Sarasin, as well as Anupong's latest public reiteration of his views, but we cannot entirely dismiss the possibility of a coup. Anand, playing coy, stated there would "not be a coup in the traditional sense of the word," but warned that the next three weeks were: "very perious; anything could happen." The NCCC decision against Somchai and an expected October 21 verdict in ex-Thaksin Shinawatra's corruption case are two wildcards; even if the NCCC decision cannot force Somchai to step down, it will likely be used by his opponents to claim he and his government lack legitimacy.

13. (C) Comment, cont: We continue reaching out to interlocutors on all sides to solicit their views and inform them of our support for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, within the constitutional framework, as well as our opposition to a coup. Two Privy Councilors declined to meet with us this week; a third agreed to a telephone call late October 17 after he returns to Bangkok. The Embassy has sought to facilitate a phone call from Admiral Keating to Army Commander Anupong, which we believe would provide valuable reinforcement of our message, although Anupong has so far declined to engage. End Summary and Comment.

Arsa: No Coup

14. (C) The Ambassador, in Hawaii for the EAP COM conference, phoned Arsa Sarasin, the King's Principal Private Secretary, on October 16. Arsa stressed that Army Commander Anupong Paojinda and others in positions of authority understood the negative consequences of a coup d'etat, and Anupong would not/not conduct a coup. Arsa said the Ambassador did not need to worry about this scenario. Arsa also said that Queen Sirikit would soon visit hospitalized police officers, to dispel the perception of her support for the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). (Note: This perception spread after the Queen presided over the funeral ceremony of a PAD supporter who died in a recent clash with police -- reftel. End Note.)

Anupong: Declines to talk but says army should stay out

15. (U) GEN Anupong, speaking on live TV late October 16 at the time of writing as part of a panel of all key military

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commanders (Supreme Commander Songkitti and the three service chiefs), reiterated his previously expressed views: the Army must remain neutral; the two sides should resolve their problems through discussion; and military intervention would not solve the problems facing the country.

16. (C) The Embassy has tried to facilitate a phone call from PACOM Commander Admiral Keating to Anupong to reinforce our message. Anupong's foreign liaison office director indicated Anupong "did not feel comfortable" engaging at this point with foreign officials. In early October, Anupong aide Colonel Saranyu Viriyavejakul told us that Anupong understood well international views about the impropriety of military intervention, had no intention of involving the Army in the political process, and was exasperated that he was so frequently sought out by Thais and foreigners to discuss the ongoing political situation.

Anand: Perilous time

17. (C) The Charge d'Affaires met on October 16 with former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, one of Thailand's elder statesmen who retains close ties to the Palace. Charge emphasized to Anand the USG's concern about the direction of developments in Thailand, and the strongly negative response the U.S. would have in the event of a coup. Anand offered assurances that there "would not be a coup in the traditional sense of the word," but said the next three weeks were perilous for Thailand, which "never in history had been so deeply divided."

18. (C) Anand claimed that the way in which the government had dealt with protesters in front of parliament on October 7 might prove to be the "turning point," regardless of whether poor police training and impulsive on site command decisions had led to what he considered excessive use of force, or whether the action had been ordered by government officials. Anand alleged that the handling of the protests, including firing of tear gas horizontally at a distance less than 100

meters directly into a packed crowd compounded a situation for a government which was failing to govern, failing to manage the problems facing the country, and therefore lacking legitimacy.

¶9. (C) Anand professed not to know a clear path which could resolve the crisis, but he clarified remarks he made publicly October 14 after the funeral of a PAD supporter killed on October 7: ex-PM Thaksin held the key to dissolving the crisis. Thaksin could gracefully accept fate/legal judgment for his transgressions, stop directing and funding political activities, and allow the country to move forward. The problem, stated Anand, that Thaksin did not want to give up either money or (indirect) power.

Not wanting to hear our message?

¶10. (C) Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda and Privy Councilor Siddhi Savetsila, both seen as connected to efforts to bring down the Somchai government, declined to meet/talk to us October 16. Prem's assistant, a Vice Admiral, told us that Prem did not feel comfortable meeting with foreign diplomats at the current "delicate" time, adding that Prem had declined a similar request from the British Ambassador. Siddhi's secretary simply told us Siddhi was not available this week. Privy Councilor (and former Prime Minister) Surayud Chulanont, upcountry in Khorat, deferred receiving a phone call from the Charge until the evening of October 17, after he returns to Bangkok. (Comment: We believe that the Privy Councilors could guess the purpose of the requested meetings and that they most likely made a deliberate decision not to engage. End Comment.)

Pro-Thaksin Ex-FM's Assessment

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¶11. (C) We also spoke October 17 with former Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama, who remains active in PPP circles. Noppadon told us he considered a coup d'etat to be "possible" but not/not a "strong possibility." He speculated that hypothetical chaos resulting from street demonstrations might trigger a coup, and he assessed that the PAD "no doubt" remained intent on bringing about the downfall of the current government by whatever means possible. Noppadon believed that the military had not intervened after the October 7 clash between the PAD and police because the Thai public would not easily tolerate a coup, and because Army Commander Anupong, whom Noppadon viewed as "quite sophisticated," was personally reluctant to launch one. Noppadon noted, however, that pressure for a coup might increase if an investigatory panel were to determine that Prime Minister Somchai had personally directed the October 7 police action against PAD protestors.

¶12. (C) We asked Noppadon whether Somchai was considering dissolving the House of Representatives, as his opponents have urged, in order to calm the situation. Noppadon said Somchai considered House dissolution an option of last resort. A new election would not solve the fundamental problems afflicting the government, Noppadon said; PAD would return to the streets in the event of another victory by the pro-Thaksin party. He added that PPP would not fare as well in another election as it had in 2007's; the party had new leadership and was less popular, and it no longer could campaign on a "bring Thaksin home" platform. It would be wiser, Noppadon felt, for the PPP to hold on to the advantages it currently enjoyed based on the last election's results.

PM Somchai charged with dereliction of duty in old case

¶13. (SBU) The NCCC resolved late on October 17 that PM

Somchai, while Justice Ministry PermSec in 2000, committed a grave offense by not punishing two senior Ministry officials for failure to impose a 70 million baht (\$2.1 million) fee in an auction of land belonging to a provincial court. Senior Judge Chamnan Rawiwanpong filed a complaint at the time against Somchai and then Justice Minister Suthas Ngoenmuen (Democrat Party) for dereliction of duty. The NCC will forward its resolution to the Justice Ministry's Civil Services Committee to consider whether to retroactively fire Somchai as a civil servant. If such a dismissal were to stand up through an appeals process, Somchai's qualification as an MP and as Prime Minister could be open to question. He is under no obligation to reign as a result of this indictment, however.

ENTWISTLE